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ABSTRACT

This speech assesses potential deterrents to the implementation of accountability in education. The author divides these deterrents into (1) philosophical-ideological; humanist-behaviorist conflicts, individuality versus "techno-urban fascism," and accountability systems tied to the achievement of cognitive objectives at the lower end of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives; (2) political-legal, governance problems and the legal capacity of a school board to contract for educational services; and (3) technological-economic, the lack of technologies and financial resources for defining, measuring, and producing learning outcomes. (JF)

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DETERRENTS TO ACCOUNTABILITY

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We are living in troubled times. The past decade has witnessed an increased and broadened interest in education from all segments of society; much of this interest has been generated by conflicting values concerning important educational issues. Social controversy has surrounded most proposals of salient significance to schools. Witness the turmoil associated with issues such as the provision of equal educational opportunity, integration, appropriate financial support structures, and local versus centralized control.

Coupled with controversy and conflict has been a serious erosion of public confidence in the ability of existing institutions to meet legitimate social needs. Demands for accountability have reached crisis proportions in some institutional sectors. Widespread dissatisfaction has been registered concerning the quality of our air and water, the scarcity and cost of needed medical services, the inability of courts to handle an avalanche of cases, the deteriorating economic and social life chances available to minorities and the poor, the presumed educational outcomes of schooling and other issues of critical import. There are increasingly strident calls for bringing the poor and disenfranchised into a meaningful interface with schools; for revamping both teaching and curriculum;

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for decentralizing bureaucratic structures; for making schools the advocates and defenders of children from discrimination and exploitation stemming from poor housing, deficient diets, skimpy medical care, and neglect by public agencies. The placidity and social stability of the 1940s and '50s have clearly been replaced in the late '60s and early '70s by a broad and insistent panorama of social turmoil. Schools and other social institutions have been engulfed in a flood tide of exponential social change.

It is against this sweeping social backdrop that educators must assess the growing public clamor for accountability in education. Clear headed assessments are needed now concerning the philosophical-idealogical commitments to this concept; the political-legal constraints and motive powers surrounding possibilities for its acceptance; and the technological-economic changes necessary for its implementation. The need to begin discussions about possible deterrents to accountability is both urgent and timely. My purpose is to begin this dialogue, and to do it selectively in terms of philosophical-ideological impediments, political-legal impediments, and technological-economic impediments.

PHILOSOPHICAL-IDEOLOGICAL DETERRENTS

Despite the clamor, and notwithstanding the initial surface acceptance of certain accountability ideas by some public bodies and some educators, several compelling deterrents to accountability are beginning to surface in the philosophical-ideological arena. These deterrents find their genesis in value conflicts surrounding the purposes that are to guide the operation of schools.

Humane Versus Accountable Schools

The first deterrent highlights a humanist-behaviorist conflict. The push to make schools humane runs counter to the philosophy of accountability. In the concurrent push toward humane schools and accountable schools, we are witnessing the confrontation of two powerful educational ideologies. On the one hand there is resolute support among Silberman's many followers for making schools less grim, less joyless, less mutilative of spontaneity, less destructive of creativity, and less ruinous to the development of a healthy self-concept. On the other hand, there is an equal insistence among Lessinger's followers for movement toward accountability--with stress upon clear objectives, validated procedures, and a complete public reporting of outcomes. Campbell's recent analysis of the conflicts stemming from this confrontation of ideologies is worth pondering:

> The accountability movement stresses precise objectives, planned allocation of resources, specified procedures, and measurement of outcomes. The humane or informal school, on the other hand, places great stress on spontaneity, flexibility, individual differences, and creative experiences not only in the academic subjects but also in the arts. There is little concern with measurement and great concern with feeling, joy, and openness. One movement is highly rational and precise. The other is largely impressionistic and flexible. In a sense, it is the difference between a science and an art. (1971, p. 8).

Incompatibility between humane schools and accountable schools on other counts has, of course, not escaped the attention of professional groups. The American Federation of Teachers has already served notice that it views currently implemented performance contracting arrangements as contributing to the dehumanization of the learning process. As evidence, the Federation

cites these facts: Performance contracts depend on programmed instruction wedded to material incentives for motive power. The individualized learning arrangements create fierce competition among pupils to see who can amass the most money, radios, or green stamps. Saretsky has also highlighted a number of unattractive possibilities in his article titled, "Every Kid A Hustler": (1) Performance contracts place confrontation power in the hands of students since willfull performance or non-performance can influence the rewards and penalties of both teachers and contractors. (2) The tying of teachers' salaries to student performance may be opening a powerful new avenue for hustling teachers, and for student-based extortion. (1971, p. 595).

Individuality Versus Friendly Fascism

The conflict between what might be termed "stress on central planning for accountability" and "stress on individuality for humaneness" becomes even more sharply focused through analysis of the meaning of these movements at the broad societal level. Harman's analyses (1970, p. 1) tend to place the humanist movement in line with the development of a "person-centered society." The accountability movement, on the other hand, has much in common with what Gross (1970, 1971) has characterized as friendly, "techno-urban fascism." The characteristics of this type of fascism encompass centralized management of the economic, political, social, cultural, and technological aspects of society. The main tracer elements of friendly fascism can be identified through extrapolation of salient trends during the past fifty years--especially ballooning economic growth and technological expansion as foremost social purposes, with artificial

stimulation of consumption and human wants to provide the necessary push to sustain such goals.

The extent to which "friendly fascism" can become a model for the Western world, as suggested by Gross, will depend to a large extent on the extent to which large segments of society are willing either (1) to drift unwittingly toward such outcomes, or (2) to abandon or compromise traditional, sacred values in commonly accepted secular practices. Time alone will illuminate future choices on this score at the societal level. Harman, however, has made clear the nature of future critical choice-making needed in the education field:

> In one familiar version, accountability implies accounting in terms of behaviorally defined objectives agreed upon by the society and its delegated officials. In this form, it tends to be associated with individualized curricular management (IPI, PLAN, etc.). Diagnostic tests, modality preference and cognitive style determination, criterion-referenced tests, etc., enable the teacher to place the child on a continuum and to prescribe the next appropriate educational experience, to choose the mode of instruction to fit the individual, and continually assess progress. Management information systems, performance-guaranteed contracts, PPB systems, and the like all contribute to overall effectiveness in achieving the chosen behavioral objectives. It sounds like progress, but it could lie directly on the charted path to "friendly fascism."
>
> On the other hand, the pressures of growing consumerism, insistence on self-determination, fear of manipulation by those with expertise, push for a different concept of accountability. This version refers to the basic principle...that society is ultimately accountable to the individual... It rejects the factory-inspired quality control model and puts its trust, rather than in experise, in the ultimate ability of the consumer to choose wisely. Evaluations take such forms as independent audits and "consumer reports."
>
> Perhaps no other issue within education will reflect so faithfully the larger societal issue of "which future?" as the issue of accountability. (1970, pp. 15-16).

In the absence of theoretical frameworks powerful enough to resolve such incompatibilities, the full acceptance of one alternative over the other is clearly out of the question. Each will act as a deterrent to the acceptance of the other. Moreover, the inherent ideological conflicts between humaneness-accountability, and central planning-individuality cannot be satisfactorily resolved without attention to other issues which pose substantial hurdles to be overcome:

(a) Will accountability become the Orwellian big brother in educational decision-making about program directions and emphases?

(b) Will the push to accountability encourage the teaching of the readily quantifiable and discourage areas where quantification is difficult?

(c) Are we ready to live with the educational rigidity and structure that may accompany the quantification needed for accountability?

Education for Trivial Ends

The difficulty of quantifying many educational goals and the relatively primitive status of quality control mechanisms in education leads to another set of philosophical deterrents: Premature marriage between education and existing accountability mechanisms may tie the education enterprise to the pursuit of inconsequential ends. The programmed systems undergirding performance contracts are still very much tied to the achievement of cognitive objectives at the lower end of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.

High order cognitive objectives, or objectives in the affective domain are seldom encompassed. As yet, the systems and rhetoric of performance contracting and accountability have failed to include educational goals that befit an encompassing perception of the human condition.

One is tempted to ask what is to become of the higher order intellectual social, personal, and productive goals of education as these have been enunciated and pursued during past centuries? We know that stress is placed in accountability literature upon teaching children to read and to count. We also know, as did Plato, that teaching children to count and to read will not necessarily make them virtuous. Yet, in the consideration of what makes a complete man there is almost universal agreement placed on the need for intellectual virtues such as the love of learning, and discrimination and imagination; social virtues such as cooperation, the proper exercise of civic rights and duties, loyalty and patriotism, appreciation of other peoples; personal virtues such as the appropriate development of physical, emotional, ethical, and aesthetic components of living; and productive virtues such as the ability to make a living, to buy and consume intelligently, to fit harmoniously and productively into a home and family. It is appalling to face the prospect of setting inconsequential goals for education through pressure to adopt the underdeveloped technology and vision currently bolstering accountability concepts in education. After all, shouldn't education prepare people to live a life--as well as to provide tools to earn a living?

Reflection Versus Reconstructionism

There is a final important philosophical deterrent associated with accountability and its handmaiden, performance contracting. It is important because it focuses centrally on the role and purpose of schools: Accountability and performance contracting emphasize the conserving rather than the changing functions of education. Accountability and performance contract systems are philosophically oriented toward the perfection and validation of "what is" rather than the exploration of "what ought to be." The conserving, reflective stance permeates accountability thinking in relation to what is to be taught and learned. Such a philosophy pays scant attention to the reconstructive, change roles of education. Educational outcomes are relegated to the trailing, rather than the growing edge of social movement. It is unlikely, for example, that Count's question, "Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?," will ever be raised in the context of accountability experiments and performance contracts. This unique form of tunnel vision concerning the aims, purposes, and roles of education looms as a serious issue--especially for the many who are unwilling to accept a limited, truncated role for educational institutions.

POLITICAL-LEGAL DETERRENTS

Consideration of the political-legal ramifications of accountability reveals a number of resistances that may be viewed as serious deterrents.

Governance and Responsibility for Education

Fear is at the center of the first political deterrent: There is an uneasiness about the effects that accountability (including performance contracts and the voucher system) will have upon the governance and control of public education. The role of the public and of elected boards of education in policy making for education is deeply ingrained in our political philosophy, and universally accepted in both Canada and United States. Any attempt to diminish or to circumvent the public's policy-making roles in education is typically resisted and viewed with suspicion. In recent pronouncements, however, performance contractors have begun to suggest that they should be allowed to operate outside the framework of school board policies. The president of QED, Inc. is quoted as saying, "The schools have to be careful not to put constraints on contractors." Statements of this kind forecast a possible drift in policy-making to a newly emerging industrial-educational complex. The public's resistance to a consequent loss of control could seriously deter implementation of accountability procedures.

A second dimension of the possible loss of control finds expression in apprehensions surrounding the voucher system. There are those who see the voucher system as a huge governmental cop- out because of its thrust to shift responsibility for providing educational services from public to private agencies. If the cry in the 1980s is that our children are still not achieving, the appropriate governmental response might well be to "choose another school" or "get another performance contractor." Could it be, some ask, that the voucher

system is a cynical national strategy for reducing governmental responsibility (accountability) in providing needed educational services?

Stiff resistance and opposition to the voucher system is being registered from a number of different sources. In the United States, The National School Boards Association voted this year to strongly oppose the education voucher plan since it would "encourage the proliferation and growth of nonpublic schools and cause a corresponding erosion of the American public school system." The NSBA noted further that a voucher plan would "lead to segregation of many children...in private schools according to race, religious denomination, ability, or educational philosophy." The net result would be to saddle the public schools with the handicapped, and with those disadvantaged and minority groups unable to meet the entrance requirements of the private schools. Further negative features include the possibility of a breakdown of the church-state barrier with another form of aid to parochial schools; and the encouragement of quack schools to snare unwary and unsophisticated parents.

The 1971 meeting of the American Association of School Administrators registered "grave alarm" concerning the prospect of a voucher plan. Possible outcomes of vouchers were detailed as follows: "the schools, traditionally operated in the public interest, would be removed from public to private control--control by each parent, which carries decentralization to absurdity; noneducational issues, such as race, background or ideology of students or staff, could determine a school's income, hence its size, its ability to function effectively, and its survival; a massive bureaucracy would be necessary to enforce safeguards

and regulations." In reference to performance contracting, it should be noted that although the 1971 NSBA convention endorsed experimentation with performance contracting, the AASA cooly noted that "when school districts contract with commercial organizations for part or all of the educational program, the result obtained may appear to be the desired one, although it is all too likely to be specious."

The emphasis on testing in the accountability movement has raised a red flag among those who fear that the results of testing will be used for comparative rather than diagnostic purposes. Is it possible, they ask, that future school board elections could be won or lost on estimates of school production?

Nor can we easily dismiss the political implications of the uneasiness of teachers concerning certain dimensions of accountability. Teachers are disturbed about trends (1) to centralize decision-making about teaching and learning; (2) to reduce the autonomy and freedom of professionals by viewing teachers as hired hands; (3) to base pay on industrial piece work concepts with incremental gain based on standardized test results (a backdoor form of merit pay?); (4) to subvert collective bargaining processes by replacing negotiated contracts with agreements between contractors and their own private staffs; (5) to use accountability as a vehicle to punish, to scapegoat, and to fix blame for performance inadequacies.

Possibly the most serious political deterrent to accountability among professionals is that accountability practices appear to present major roadblocks to the continued development of freedom and autonomy for teachers. Both NEA and AFT support the position that it is absurd to ask a profession

which has no authority to govern its own standards, to account for presumed failings in its performance. The NEA has made clear the conditions it sees as being necessary to move toward accountability:

> ...teachers must have the major voice in deciding those matters that relate directly to teaching...they must be largely responsible for determining who shall be candidates for the profession and by what standards teachers shall be prepared (including accreditation of institutions), evaluated, retained, dismissed, certified, and given tenure; how teachers shall be educated in service; how the curriculum shall be developed; and how media and materials shall be selected. Only when teachers' expertise is applied to these determinations can teachers be held more accountable. (NCTEPS of NEA, 1970).

The political implications of the NEA statement are inescapable. A reading of the Canadian scene indicates that the Canadian Teachers Federation is very much in sympathy with the NEA view, and may be closer to achievement of closure on these issues than either NEA or AFT.

Court Tests Needed

The legal deterrents to accountability stem largely from uncertainty: Major issues stemming from accountability experiments have not been tested in the courts. It may be, for example, that performance contracting (as it is currently practiced) is illegal. Its legality hinges on the courts' answer to this question: Is it permissible for school boards to contract for services with an outside group when the board already has employees hired to provide these same services? School districts, as creatures of the state, possess very limited powers to contract. Where a school district has a duty to perform a task (as required by state delegation or constitutional declaration) it must

carry out that duty. Attempts to contract out for the performance of such tasks may be void. As yet, there are no judicial decisions relating directly to educational performance contracting.

A second possible legal deterrent stems from the fact that policy-making functions delegated by the state to a school district may not be further delegated to a private group. Since the judiciary tends to scrutinize the policy-making roles of districts even more intensely than their powers to contract, districts must be careful not to delegate policy control in contracting for services.

Other interesting legal questions are sure to be tested in the courts sooner or later. Who, for example, is liable for quotas set but not met in a performance contract? Must state certified personnel be used in carrying out contract provisions? Only the schools' experience in the courts will determine which of the issues discussed will ultimately become deterrents to accountability.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC DETERRENTS

Leaving aside deterrents in the philosophical-ideological and political-legal spheres, let us turn to an examination of four formidable deterrents in the technological and economic arenas: (1) the need for precise definition of learning outcomes for students, (2) the need to invent, develop, and install teaching-learning technologies capable of producing defined outcomes, (3) the need to design measurement devices that can give valid evidence of adequate system performance, including teacher performance, (4) the need to provide resources for the research, development, diffusion, and installation costs of such educational improvements.

Defining Learning Outcomes

We noted earlier that a premature push to incorporate full-blown accountability systems in schools could tie education to the pursuit of trivial ends. Defined performance outcomes, and systems designed to achieve these outcomes, are largely lacking in education. Quantification of higher order educational aims is very difficult--even in areas where societal agreements are possible among education's pluralistic publics. Thus, the development of quantified, behaviorally-based performance outcomes to cover the full spectrum of agreed-upon public expectations for schools is destined to be a long-range undertaking. Until precise definitions of outcomes become available, the measurement of educational output will remain largely fortuitous, and implementations of accountability will tend to founder. Moreover, higher order intellectual, social, and personal aims of education have not, as yet, yielded to the precise behavioral definitions required for accountability assessments.

Teaching-Learning Technologies

Our knowledge about teaching-learning processes is still relatively primitive. We do not know what educational processes best translate educational inputs into desired educational outputs. Four years ago, I detailed some of the reasons for this state of affairs:

> (1) the knowledge base undergirding education is relatively weak--great expansions in basic knowledge appear necessary; (2) specialized roles in the areas of research, development and diffusion are relatively undefined--training programs for specialized roles require extensive development; (3) provisions for experimental innovation in education are scanty--the development of effective linkages among specialized change roles requires

> intensive attention; (4) since developmental activities lack system, educational inventions often remain invisible, undocumented and inaccessible; (5) there is a lack of a professional network of trained and competent change agents and communicators in education and, consequently, dissemination activities lack effectiveness; (6) specialists in education lack extensive creative working relationships with social scientists--the disciplinary base of participation in educational research has typically been narrow, and has often been restricted to educational psychology; and (7) the research roles of various educational agencies at local, state, regional and national levels have tended to remain unclear. (1967, p. 57).

The development of knowledge about teaching and learning sufficient to undergird the engineering of pedagogical success is destined to be a mammoth programatic undertaking. Success will require attention to research; development of facilities for storing and retrieving knowledge; attention to training research workers; and emphasis upon field testing, demonstrating, disseminating, and installing research findings. Shortcomings in this area may constitute serious deterrents to education's ability to move to full accountability:

> ...it is not inaccurate to say that provisions in the past for the development and diffusion of educational innovations have been both weak and discontinuous. Most usually, development activities have been centered in local school districts, with some assistance provided by individual university consultants, state department of education consultants, and university bureaus of field service. Few of these arrangements, however, have provided avenues for attacking development problems in a systematic, programatic fashion. Programatic approaches to development have appeared more characteristic of activities carried on by publishers and test builders than of formal education agencies.
>
> Planned, massive strategies for diffusing educational innovations have also been largely absent in the past. Most diffusion activities have been directed by governmental education agencies--primarily through conference and publication routes. Demonstration and field testing (prominent for many years in the agricultural diffusion model) have been relatively underdeveloped phases of the change process in education. Moreover, there has been no accepted

> process for legitimizing educational innovations in education. Medicine and agriculture have special agencies for this function (that is, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Agricultural Research Center). (Hencley, 1967).

The particular circumstances just cited indicate the need for long-term development of the technologies undergirding teaching and learning. Until this is done, the primitive state of knowledge vis-a-vis learning processes will deter movement toward accountability.

Measuring Performance and Output

Up to the present time, standardized tests have constituted a major vehicle for assessing student performance in accountability experiments and performance contracting. Recent developments, however, indicate that standardized tests are soon to become the flies in the performance contract ointment. A study just completed at the University of Illinois by R. E. Stake and J. L. Wardrop has found that the reliability of gain scores on two alternate forms of the same test is such that one-fourth of the pupils tested will show a year's growth in achievement merely because of the lack of discrimination by the tests. Another one-fourth will show a loss of a year for the same reason. The misinformation carried by such tests is significantly reinforced by the practice of repeated testing (such as the monthly testing in the Texarkana experiment). There is evidence to indicate that there is a 50 percent chance that two-thirds of the students will have shown a one-year gain by the fourth test--even if no instruction is given between pretests and post tests. In addition, the possibility of including standardized test items among the materials of instruction is ever present--as shown in the Texarkana experiment. Clearly,

the development of valid, reliable instruments for measuring output will constitute a formidable challenge in any significant move toward accountability.

The move to make teachers accountable for their performance is also fraught with difficulties. Competent practice can be significantly equated with a particular performance result only when there is an extensive knowledge base undergirding practice. We noted earlier that such a knowledge base is largely lacking in our field. To judge professionals without such knowledge is hazardous. In medicine, for example, we do not judge a practitioner incompetent if he is unable to cure cancer, arrest heart disease, or reverse the effects of strokes. Yet, the emphasis on product occasioned by the push toward accountability appears to overlook many things, including the weak knowledge base in education, the absence of accepted teacher models, the lack of agreement in the profession as to what constitutes "good" teaching, the lack of diagnosis and remediation techniques on the part of many teachers, and the host of social, economic, and family background variables that may interfere with learning. Moreover, a recent editorial in Saturday Review has raised a further issue surrounding the stress being placed on student outcomes as a measure of teacher effectiveness:

> ...As we focus increasingly on pupil performance as a measure of teacher effectiveness, however, it would be easy to forget the complexity of the learning process--that individual children are very different, that they learn different things at different rates, and that even the same child learns at a different rate at different times. If, therefore, the laudable effort to improve classroom practice by assessing teacher and school effectiveness merely results in placing more intense and sophisticated pressure on the children to perform, the

> very principle will be denied in practice, for if the concept means anything, it is that the ultimate accountability must be to the children. (March 20, 1971, p. 41).

Without remedy, each of the factors just cited will constitute a major roadblock to the implementation of accountability systems.

Economic Deterrents

A final major deterrent to accountability will be money. Developing accountability systems will be expensive in terms of needed research, development, diffusion, and installation costs. Further costs will accrue from the necessary major revamping of teacher education. Significant investments appear necessary for new school plants and technology. And all of this must be done in an institutional sector where taxpayers, legislators, and school board members all have reasons for wanting to resist increased costs.

Nor can we gain much comfort from the projection of past performance into the future. In the United States, as recently as a decade ago, the total amount spent for research and development by the United States Office of Education was less than the amount allocated in agencies such as Commercial Fisheries, the Forest Service, or the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. The picture at state and local school district levels is even more dismal; and, I understand, is paralleled by a similar situation in Canada. The National School Boards Association has finally recommended (in 1971) that local school districts set aside 2 percent of their budgets for research and evaluation programs. This recommendation will be found to be a niggardly investment in progress--most industries spend several times this percentage for research and development.

To push for accountability without tying in the issue of major costs is to practice the band-aid approach to educational problems. The society must guard against making accountability the new patent medicine in education; which, by the way, is a public policy equivalent of reducing pills and faddish diets that promise new panaceas without any serious change in our values or alteration in our commitments and conduct.

Much of what I have said appears to run counter to the mainstream of movement in the accountability arena. I judge this to be good: The issues must be raised and men of good will must debate them. We will need to debate issues surrounding humane schools versus accountable schools, individuality versus friendly fascism, ultimate educational ends versus lower level implementations, and the reflective versus the reconstructive role of schools. In addition, we will need to ponder the governance and control implications of accountability, the legal deterrents that may be associated with the movement, the response of boards, administrators, and teachers to some of its manifestations, and the impact upon children and the larger society stemming from its implementation. Finally, we must carefully consider our technological and economic capability to move ahead.

Our difficult times have spawned an avalanche of movement toward accountability. We need equal time for hardheaded consideration of major impediments. It would be tragic to be stampeded into something so far reaching in its implications as accountability without time to reflect and to think through major implications of a philosophical-ideological, political-legal, and technological-economic nature.

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